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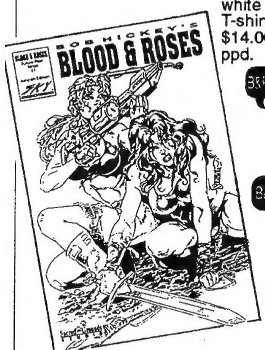

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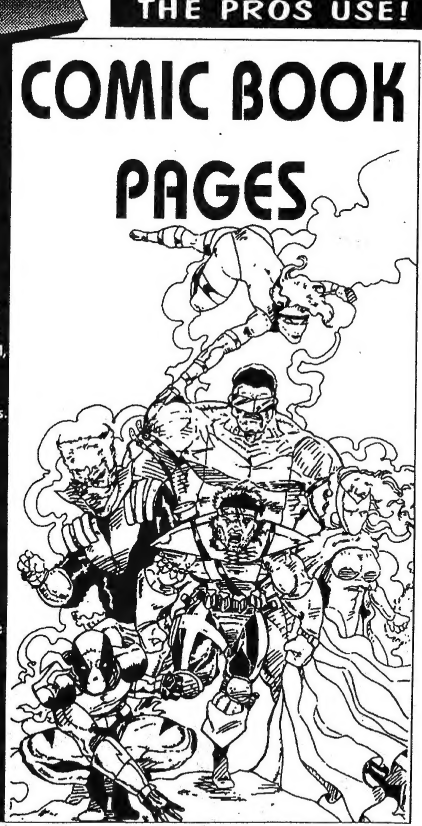

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Editorial

"For all we know, we may still have a way to go."
The Kinks, 1978
A Rock 'N Roll Fantasy

Whoa! I have to admit that it took us fourteen issues to finally get out one special edition to you guys. I don't know what it is with special editions, you'd think that people would order more of them, but we had to cancel the first one we wanted to do because apparently not many retailers wanted it. Then, we decided to try one with a cover featuring some characters that would have a chance at selling the darn thing and... Voila! Keith Giffen renders the trenching Trencher man (now with those wonky guys at Blackball Comics) and the shadowy Shadowhawk dude.

I've been plugging away late nights putting this one together for you guys so I hope I did my job well and that you enjoy this edition; our first of hopefully many *Arena Spectaculars*. If you love it and think we should do more, or if you don't like it so much and might have a suggestion or two, don't call me (I'm probably still asleep) but PLEASE write to us! I love hearing from you guys. It tickles my fancy.

We've solicited up through issue #18 as of this writing and some of the features to come are Erik Larsen, Frank Miller, Todd McFarlane and Art Thibert. That's four issues that you absolutely must have!

Lately I spoke with Art Thibert's brother, Anthony, and he told me that in his opinion, "Arena is the best-written magazine out there." You can imagine how that made me feel... absolutely giddy. Actually, he's right, though. And I'm not going to compare ourselves with any magazine in particular... just all of them.

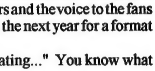
What I'm getting at here is that if your read our magazine and find yourself delighting in the fact, then help us out here by telling your retailer to carry more *Arenas*. That's right! Believe it or not, this is a sales pitch (and you were expecting a thought-provoking editorial). Sales have been fluctuating since the debut of *Hero Illustrated* so we are opting to settle into a sporadic schedule not only for the sake of catching up (yes, we're running behind) but also because we're only going for the really BIG cover features in order to sell higher quantities.

Looking at the big picture, it's kind of sad that all these fan magazines feel they have to compete with each other. There's room in the industry for all of us, I believe. On the other hand, how many dollars do you have in your pocket and how many of them do you want to spend on books about comic books? What we're slowly moving to achieve is making *Arenas* niche even more distinctive by making it the sounding board for readers and the voice to the fans for professionals. Keep your eyes open in the next year for a format change of sorts.

"Please excuse the mess, we're redecorating..." You know what I'm saying.

Thanks for reading. Be swell.

Until next time, I remain...



Joe Martin

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DEFIANT

KEITH GIFFEN

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *How's Trencher doing, Keith? Have you heard from him lately?*

Keith Giffen: [Chuckles] I'm notting letting this character go. I enoy the character and there seems to be a reader base out there, also, that enjoys the character. I just trotted him on over to Blackball. That's Dave Eliot's new outfit and in December he will be appearing in the *Trencher X-Mas Bites* special.

JM: *Right around the same time as this.*

KG: Yeah. Probably in the spring of '94 -- I want to give myself a broad enough runway -- I'll be launching the book in one form or another. I'm wanting it to be a monthly book but it may end up being a whenever-the-hell-I-get-around-to-it book. He'll also be appearing in a companion book that is tentatively being called Blackball Comics, I think. *Trencher* strips running in there will be about ten pages an issue. He'll be treated kind of like Batman was treated in the old *Brave and Bold* series; going up against various characters. He'll butt heads with Blitz the Manic Mandrill which is one of Simon Bisley's characters. The second story arc I believe involves Mr. Monster, who was created by Michael Gilbert.

JM: *Now, didn't Dave Eliot have something to do with Mr. Monster?*

KG: Hmm... I believe that when it was a part of Tundra UK or whatever they were calling it that Dave was handling *Mr. Monster* for a while. Lovern (Kindzierski) has a character called Speed that will also be going up against Trencher. That one will be kind of nice because I don't have to do a lot with it. Lovern will be writing it and he'll get an artist to do it so I can just sit back and enjoy.

JM: *That'll be nice for a change.*

KG: It's not that the character is disappearing. He'll have almost a higher profile than before actually. It's just a matter of getting the news around that just because there's no longer an "i" on the book don't believe it's not the same book! If you enjoyed it before, then you'll enjoy it now.

JM: *Do you want to go on record and update us on the status of* ***Trencher*** *#5?*

KG: Right now I have to wait and see. I talked with Image yesterday and they're going to figure out exactly what to do with it. It's going to have to be re-solicited. I told them that, at this point, the *Trencher* book from Blackball is going to be out before *Trencher* #5. The ball is in their court.

JM: *It's got to be rather frustrating.*

KG: [Thoughtful pause] Yeah. It is. But I'm going to sit tight and just see if I can weather the storm that the industry is going through right now. Once the smoke clears, then it's just getting back to business as usual, churning out a book. I've had a couple of really weird months here, though.

JM: *Hopefully everything is back on-line, now?*

KG: Pretty much. We've also got coming out the first ever

Blackball before-the-books-came-out sort of but not quite crossover. This will be appearing in Diamond's *Previews* which will be a short two-pages per issue format. I'm one of the few people actually stupid enough to do two of these company-wide crossovers. I did two of them for DC and, not having learned my lesson, I went back and got involved with the *Eclipso* thing.

I think I know what makes crossovers tick. Now, what I'm going to do is go in and deconstruct it. Hopefully this will have a lot of people thinking twice about ever doing a company-wide crossover again. Ideally we will have shown it to be such an incredibly ridiculous, unwieldy, done-only-for-the-bucks scheme. I mentioned for another publication that crossover can be defined as "one best-selling book and four dogs."

I can remember that when I was a kid -- and my parent's weren't swimming in dough and, no, this isn't going to be one of those "depression" stories -- I went down to the store and I had a certain amount of money to spend. At that time I followed Gene Colan's *Daredevil* religiously. I did not miss an issue. I don't think I would have appreciated it if, one month, I picked up an issue and found out it was part six in a forty-five part crossover and that I'd have to buy every single one of these if I wanted to follow the story. As a kid who had supported that book I would be like, "Hey! I can't afford to buy all this!" I think, if that had happened, I would have just wandered off. Not every kid walks into a comic book store with fifty bucks in his pocket.

JM: *What do you think a solution would be if maybe these--*

KG: Never do them again.

JM: *Never do them again?*

KG: Never, ever do them again. Except maybe if you're going to do a company-wide crossover, put it out in a separate book and don't make it crossover into any of the other books. Now, some people will begin to squeal about continuity and how can Thor be appearing in the crossover if he's appearing in his regular book... Snap out of it. It's a comic book. You figure it out. That's ridiculous with this, "Where was Thor Thursday afternoon at 2:15 p.m.?" crap. When it comes right down to it, who cares! If you're going to do a company-wide crossover, do it in a separate series. That way the kids have a choice.

JM: *What exactly is Blackball?*

KG: Blackball is made up of a bunch of people who looked at the state of the industry and said, "Aw, jeez!" These are people who believe that comics should be fun again. They don't want to be tied up in continuity or the "why this and that" and the cosmic angst crossover continued stories and zipadee-doodah cover enhancements. Blackball is aiming to put out comics that if the readers like them, then they'll come back for more. If you like books that have sort of a lunatic edge to them and you share our sensibilities and our sense of humor then you're going to have a ball. We're trying to give readers a viable option here. The tagline at Blackball is "You're Not As Stupid As They Think You Are" and that's aimed at the readers.

JM: *Good. So what does the future hold for the character of Trencher?*

KG: [Heavy sigh] Your guess is as good as mine. I'm doing some very "spur of the moment" stuff. When I started on the *Trencher X-Mas Bites* story I had a basic idea what it was going to be about... a *VERY* basic idea. When I sat down to actually do it was when I started piecing everything together. To be honest, when I started *Trencher*, I didn't know how it was going to end.

JM: *[Laughs] That's very spontaneous. That reminds me a bit about how Erik Larsen told me he worked.*

KG: Yeah, and you can tell, too. *The Savage Dragon* is one of those books that seems to have a forward momentum. Like Erik, too, I probably miss as much as I hit. But if you're really trying and you're out there having fun doing it, then that translates.

VAL SEMEIKS

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *So, what's new, Val?*

Val Semeiks: I'm doing the *Lobo* monthly for DC. Alan Grant is the writer, John Dell is the inker, Bill Oakley is the letterer and Gloria Vasquez is the colorist whose colors wil be computer separated.

JM: *DC is taking on lots of computer coloring.*

VS: It's a good move. The book is beautiful. We're even printing on glossy paper.

JM: *About time, huh?*

VS: I'm very happy with all the production on this book. I'm having the most fun I've had in comics. The storyline is terrific, the inks are beautiful. I'm delighted. It's a lot of fun to draw.

JM: *The last time we spoke back in* ***Arena*** *#6, I recall you mentioned something about a dinosaur story?*

VS: Oh, yes. *Captain Stone and the Dinosaurs.* It hasn't come out yet. It'll be out in early '94. It's a little delayed in coming out. *Lobo* and *Captain Stone* are my two big projects. I did the second half of *Bloodbath* #2, also. That was pretty much straightforward superhero stuff. Lobo is in that. Just about every DC superhero is in it, it seems.

JM: *Are you sort of hoping now to carve your niches as THE Lobo artist?*

VS: Hmm... I don't know if I should say that. Since I'm doing the monthly book I suppose it'll certainly get some attention. There are lots of people working on *Lobo* specials. The *Lobo* monthly, of course, will be ongoing.

JM: *Any major shake-ups on the horizon for the Lobo character?*

VS: Lobo's pretty much of a primal character. He doesn't really change all that much.

He'll be a bounty hunter and do some other work-for-hire type of stuff.

JM: *Are there any L.E.G.I.O.N. people coming into all of this?*

VS: There are some L.E.G.I.O.N. connections, although not predominantly. Vril Dox appears in #3, I believe. I'm working on #6 so it's hard to remember exactly when he appears. It might be #4.

JM: *Six issues ahead? That's pretty good.*

VS: Yeah. It definitely gives me a little breathing room. It gives the colorist time and the separator time. The colorist does a basic color guide and then the separator has to interpret that and put it into the computer. These kind of seps has a full gradation that will allow for some excellent effects.

JM: *Any major appearances in the first few issues of Lobo?*

VS: No, it's just about all-new characters. Lobo is off in a galaxy somewhere pursuing his bounty hunter interests and there's a lot of humor in the book. There's really not much that is very nice about Lobo. I think the term hero doesn't conform to his character. Most of the time he just gets placed up against people who are worse than he is. You're probably not going to see much character development as far as Lobo is concerned. He is what he is.

JM: *I wonder if there will ever come a day when we'll see*

a kinder, more gentler Lobo.

VS: I don't think we have any plans on exploring the sensitive side of Lobo.

JM: *It's just a whole lot of fun and I suppose his unpredictability makes it a good time being the artist.*

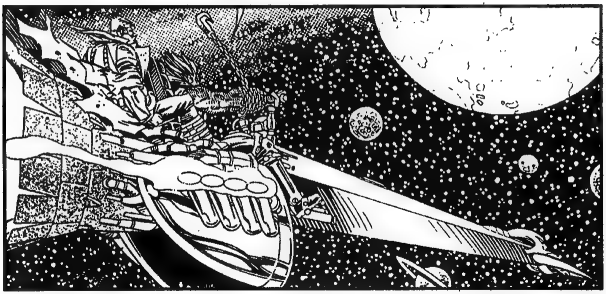
VS: I'm having a whole lot of fun. It's outer space, science fiction-type stuff with a lot of unusual characters in different situations. I would describe the tone of *Lobo* as somewhere between the *Terminator* and *The Three Stooges*. This isn't grim comics. It's very fast-paced, laugh-out-loud stuff.

JM: *With a little bit of action.*

VS: [Laughs] Yeah, with a little bit. I don't know exactly what people are going to expect or how they might react because it is very much what I call "violent humor." There's no "Adults Only" label. The violence is cartoony in a way but I don't think that kids under ten years old should be reading it. You'll see lots of big guns, explosions, tanks and what not. One guy gets his nose ripped off in the first issue.

JM: *And that sums it up.*

VS: [Laughs] Yeah. It pretty much does.



HUGH HAYNES

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *Hey, Hugh, what're ya' doin?*

Hugh Haynes: Right now I'm working on the "Suicide Run" crossover that is running through the three *Punisher* titles for Marvel. I have a *Punisher* bookshelf graphic novel that I'm also working on and then I will be moving on to the *Punisher War Journal*.

JM: *That sounds good.*

HH: Yeah. Plus this will allow me the opportunity to work on stuff that will involve the rest of the Marvel Universe such as Spider-Man and Daredevil and the like so I'm really looking forward to it.

JM: *I suppose you're really looking ahead to that because up until now you've been strictly doing the "Punisher Universe."*

HH: Right. Steven Grant does most of my writing and Mark McKenna does the inks and hopefully we'll be staying together on this stuff. We'll be working together as far as I can see on the *War Journal* book so that's good.

JM: *As far as the storylines go, are you happy with how things are coming about?*

HH: What do you think, it's Steven Grant! I think the readers will really get into this stuff. It's great.

JM: *It seems that for some time now Punisher has been going through a stagnant period. His "hot character" status seems somewhat diminished. Any comments?*

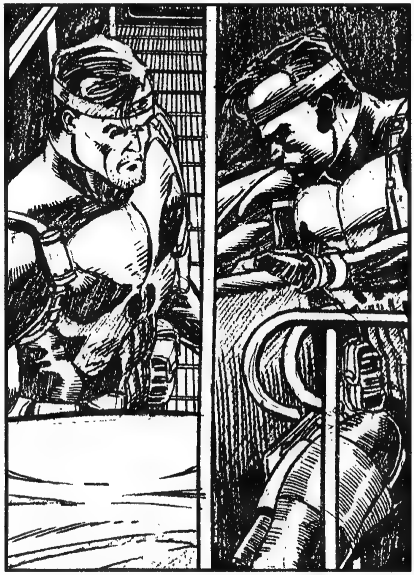
HH: Well, you're right. I think that there have been a lot of short, separate non-related stories happening for some time now that is much to blame for the lack of interest in the character. We'll be concentrating on giving Punisher much more of an objective... a sense of direction. I think that "Suicide Run" is the beginning of giving the Punisher a renewed solidity and an ongoing theme for the character. Chuck Dixon, Larry Hama and Steven Grant are the three writers working on this and they are three very good writers and they feel much the same way I do regarding this, I believe. John Buscema is drawing *War Zone* and Gary Kwapisz is doing *War Journal* and I'm excited to be the third artist rounding out that trio. I'm real excited about this whole series.

JM: *So, are you pretty far ahead on your work?*

HH: No! [laughs] The story I'm working on now is suppose to be in stores in six to seven weeks. That's why I'm working as we talk.

JM: *So, how much can you tell me without giving too much away?*

HH: [Long pause] Uh, something happens in the second part of the ten-part "Suicide Run" storyline that is pretty catastrophic. I'm not saying that the Punisher is going to die, but he might. A lot of Punisher



"wannabees" come out of the woodwork. There's also going to be the death of a major supporting character.

JM: *That should be interesting. I suppose we won't say who?*

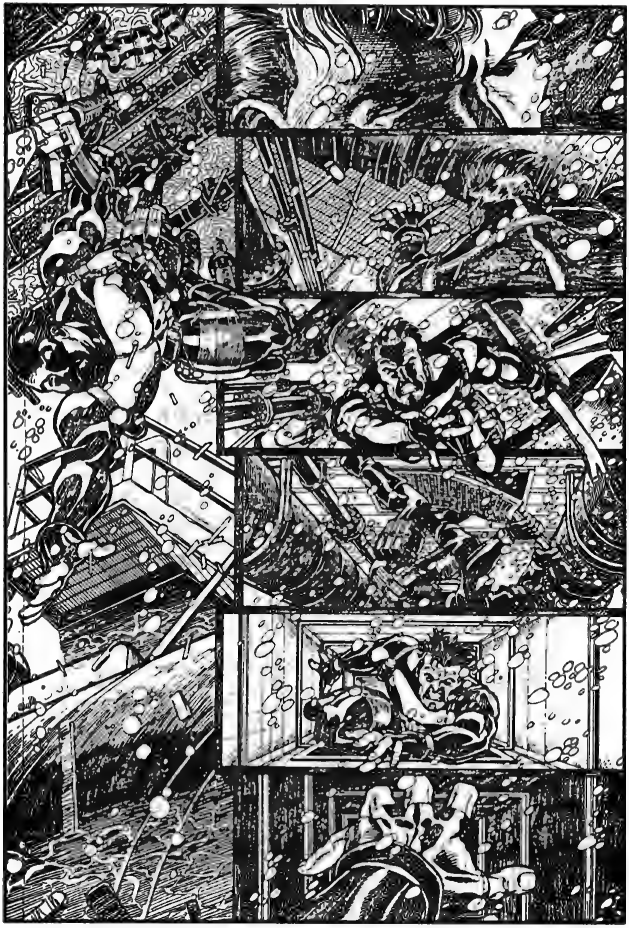
HH: [Laughs]

JM: *I didn't think so. Who is going to take over the regular* ***Punisher*** *series after you move on to* ***War Journal****?*

HH: I really don't know.

JM: *Are there other projects that you're working on?*

HH: This is it... for the forseeable future I'm going to be jamming away on *Punisher War Journal* and little else.



JOHN BYRNE

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *So let's talk about your current releases.*

John Byrne: Even as we speak I am working on the first issue of *Danger Unlimited.*

JM: Some excitement is definitely brewing about that.

JB: Good. I love to hear it. I think it'll be fun. I've been saying that it's everything the *Next Men* isn't. It's much more superhero-oriented. It's about a bunch of people who get their super powers from a crashed flying saucer in South America. Thet tells you right away that this is not the *Next Men.*

JM: *The* ***Next Men*** *takes a very practical, realistic approach to the superhero genre. It's an interpretation of what the world would be like if superheroes really did exist and I think you handle it really well.*

JB: Aw, thank you.

JM: *Has the interest kept going on* ***Next Men*** *up until this point?*

JB: Oh, absolutely, if you mean mine, yes [laughs]. It's just that I found myself strangely missing the big cosmic hoo-hah stuff. It was always fun to draw.

JM: *I'm sure people don't mind.*

JB: They seem to like it [chuckles]. I'm going to reach a broader audience, too. There won't be a mature readers label on the cover. I won't be using any "dirty" words and stuff like that.

JM: *Have you received any negative reactions to that part of what you're doing with* ***Next Men****?*

JB: No, not at all, really. I do think it shows itself somewhat in the sales. We do restrict the audience that way.

JM: *You have formed the Legend imprint with some other guys that is under Dark Horse...*

JB: It's through Dark Horse, not under Dark Horse [laughs].

JM: *Right. I hear that the talk about that had been going for a while before you guys finally decided to do that?*

JB: Yeah, it had. Last year (in '92) in San Diego, with a somewhat different group and a somewhat different name, with what turned out to be somewhat different goals for somewhat different people; it kind of got stalled. Finally, Frank Miller called me up and said, "Look, why don't we just declare ourselves dictators and say 'Here's what's going to happen!'" We talked to various people of that group and most were prepared to let us be dictators since they realized that was the only way it was going to happen at all.

JM: *That's exciting. Just for readers who aren't certain, who all's in that line-up?*

JB: Let's see, we've got Frank Miller, Geoff Darrow, Dave Gibbons, Mike Mignola, Art Adams, Paul Chadwick and myself. Seven.

JM: *All working on their respective titles and some more than one.*

JB: Yes.

JM: *You're continuing with* ***Next Men****, starting up on* ***Danger Unlimited*** *and writing* ***Hellboy****?*

JB: Sort of. Mike (Mignola) asked me to serve as scripter on *Hellboy* which is "What If the Demon was a member of the Challengers of the Unknown?" kind of thing. It's a very strange but a very fun book. I keep telling him that he's going to have an epiphany anyday and realize that he can write it all

himself. He's coming up with the story and he writes me copious notes about what people are saying and I just say, "Mike, these notes can be in a balloon [laughs]!"

JM: *Is he wary of writing things wondering if it sounds like how people really talk?*

JB: He's just nervous about the whole writing concept, I think. There are people out there that think writing is very scary. I'm not one of them... maybe it shows in my work, I don't know [laughs]! Some people just feel that writing is terribly hard to do.

JM: *Is Mignola involved with* ***Next Men*** *in any way?*

JB: Mike did a cover for an issue and a ten-page segment in that issue. The segment introduces Hellboy. He is essentially a comic book character come to life and he and Danger Unlimited do share a universe but the Next Men do not.

JM: *Yes, you've been doing the comic characters coming to life sort of thing in* ***Next Men****.*

JB: Yeah, that's the focus of the next main story arc after "Faith." It's called "Power" and it covers why all these characters are running around. I've already got permission from some other guys to use real comic book characters. Frank's Marv from *Sin City* is going to appear and so is Paul's Concrete. Poor deluded Paul has given me permission to do anything I want with that character so I'll probably have him beat some guy to a bloody pulp which is totally out of character [laughs].

JM: *Yow! He probably blanched at that.*

JB: Well, no, actually, he gave me the go-ahead.

JM: *So the* ***Next Men*** *will remain an ongoing monthly?*

JB: Yes. I'm limiting myself to four-issue story arcs with a monthly break in between. Basically I'll be doing what is the equivalent of 19 issues a year.

JM: *That's nothing for you.*

JB: Exactly. That's half my load. I say that to Mignola and he turns white in the face.

JM: *You certainly have cranked out issues in your time.*

JB: Well, there have been a few instances where I think I have "over-committed" myself [chuckles]. When I went freelance I was barraged with all these cool ideas and it was very hard to turn down a lot of them.

JM: *Are you happy? Have you settled in to where you think you want to be for the moment?*

JB: I think so.

I like creator-owned stuff. I like the power! Nobody can tell me what I can or can't do. Although I am going to be dipping back into that pool in a couple of months. Mike Carlin wanted me to do one of the Superman annuals and I agreed on the condition that I could do a story that I've been wanting to do for some time.

JM: *Have you missed Superman?*

JB: Yes, I have. Superman was an important part of my life as a child as well as an adult.

JM: *And you've been an important part of his life.*

JB: Yeah, I suppose so. The annuals this year are going to be what DC calls "Elseworlds" so I

get to mess with the character even more than I did the last time [laughs]. The Elseworlds where I'm placing my Superman is 1776. It's Superman with long hair and a ponytail. It's a story that I came up with nearly twenty years ago. It's gone through so many permutations over the years... so when Carlin asked me to do Elseworlds I pretty much jumped at the chance.

JM: *Have we covered all your current projects?*

JB: Well, there's always bits and pieces of other things. Harlan Ellison approached me to do an adaptation of his story "I Have No Mouth And I'm A Scream" for an anthology title that Dark Horse is doing.

JM: *You've been with Dark Horse for a while now.*

JB: Two years. They're very good. One has trouble with every comic company over the years but at least the rewards -- not monetary, but emotional -- toward the creator with Dark Horse are very gratifying. I never have to call an editor and say, "Is it okay to do this?" I call the editor and say, "This is what I'm doing." And they're reply is, "Go ahead, John! It's not like we can stop you."

JM: *That has to be nice. Maybe all publishers will learn their place someday.*

JB: [Chuckles] Maybe. Maybe someday they'll realize that we don't want to break the toys, just play with them.

JM: *Of course, editors are good for the younger guys just coming in. I mean, well, you are John Byrne.*

JB: Oh, definitely. Part of the reason behind my leaving Marvel is that I felt I was getting these neophyte editors who, in many respects, were treating me like I was some new kid on the block. It was like, "Gee, I've been doing this longer than some of you guys have been alive." That situation just didn't sit well with me. I got uppity and eventually just struck out on my own.

JM: *So, now we're up-to-date?*

JB: I think so. We've got *Next Men, Danger Unlimited* and, of course, I've finished it so I tend to forget about it but I did an *Elfquest* lately that is going to be out probably around the same time this will be out. That was great fun getting to ink Wendy (Pini) and Cutter and Rayek beat the $#!+ out of each other so what more can I ask for?

JM: *That's what every **Elfquest** reader has been wanting to see.*

JB: I know I've been waiting fifteen years for it.

JM: *It just occurred to me that when we interviewed you last in **Arena** #11 it ended on a **Elfquest** note.*

JB: Well, then ,we'll just have to do this every year.

AL GORDON

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *Hey, Al, what's going on?*

Al Gordon: I'm finishing up *WildStar*. We did four issues that ended up being what was a very long story and it took the better part of the last nine months to do it. This has been a real learning experience for me basically doing... well, everything. I actually enjoyed it but it was probably the most hectic year of my life.

JM: *So what goes beyond this?*

AG: Jerry's busy finishing up his Captain Marvel thing for DC but I've got somebody else I'm working with on the *WildStar* regular series that will either be bi-monthly or something like nine-times-a-year sort of deal like DCs in the '60s. It turned out to

be more work than I can get done around here in a month.

JM: *Who is the "somebody else?"*

AG: I can't say. He's under contract still so I'm not disclosing his name just yet.

JM: *That's cool. In addition to WildStar are you working on any other stuff?*

AG: I've outlined six concepts, two of which I was going to throw by DC a couple years ago before I realized that working on something I owned was a much better deal. Why should I give it to somebody, you know? So these will end up being subplots in *WildStar*. One in particular is probably my favorite story I've written so far. I don't think I want to put that one in *WildStar*, though. I'd rather it be a separate series. It may not really be Image material so I may have to consider other options more than likely.

JM: *What's it about, or can you say?*

AG: This is almost superhero in a horror/weird sort of way. If you look at *WildStar*, for example, it looks visually superhero but it's actually rather bizarre -- living "pets" stuck onto people.

JM: *Are you into somewhat of a horror aspect where you're coming from?*

AG: Yeah. I think that sort of came around when I was working with Keith (Giffen) on the *Legion (of Superheroes)*. The first thing I had written was this four-part story called "The Quiet Darkness." I still like it. I just recently went back and read it again after not having seen it for two years or so. Actually, it works okay and I was really surprised. I thought I was going to read it and go, "Oh, God!"

JM: *Do you normally tend to go back and look at your written stuff and be really critical?*

AG: Well, honestly I really haven't written that much, Joe... about fourteen comics at this point. What's funny is there's this common thread that runs through *Legion of Superheroes* and into the *Timber Wolf* miniseries and into *WildStar* as repeating characters but what I realized is that, not so much the characters but, three plot threads that ran through these titles, were unconscious. I tied them all together besides the five or six that I was conscious about. Whoa! It's kind of odd how your subconscious can work for you that way.

JM: *That's a good sign of a writer.*

AG: Or somebody with not that many ideas, I guess [chuckles]. I really want to work on this other project, though, but I'm afraid to tell anybody what it's about. It's obviously paranoia to some extent but basically I haven't told anybody about this idea except for Erik Larsen and I told him not to tell anybody. Honestly, there's only about three people who know about this. It's a really twisted, horror-oriented sort of semi-quasi superhero story. Erik thought it was pretty bizarre which I guess means he liked it. It's sort of organic, sort of cybertech and it's a strangely philosophical story. It was a very vivid, psychological nightmare I had one afternoon that crawled out of some dark corner of my psyche. I was working really hard and on the verge of a nervous breakdown and took a nap one day. I woke up with this weird concept. The name and everything just hit me like a brick in the head.

JM: *It's a good thing that you have an outlet for these things that go on in your brain.*

AG: Yeah. But I don't think it's so much brain as...

JM: *The darkness or maybe the id that is within you.*

AG: I'll go with that. Writing, to me, is a lot like throwing up. I hope it's not that way when the readers read it.

JM: *[Laughs]*

AG: But it's about expunging what's inside you. It's almost like a form of personal exorcism that most writers go through.

JM: *A catharsys, so to speak.*

AG: Yes. That's a very good word for it. What I was going to say before, though, was that I'm getting a weird take on things by working with Keith (Giffen) which is a lot like working with Freddy Krueger.

JM: *[Laughs] Twisted is a very good word for Keith. I think he's evil.*

AG: I don't... hmm... yeah, maybe he is! He's evil in a nice way, though. He's one of the livest wires you'll ever come across. If some people are a firecracker, Keith is a cannon. I' haven't worked with many people. There's Joe Phillips, Jerry Ordway and then Keith and all of these people are incredible talents. However, I was most probably Jerry's "Freddy Krueger."

JM: *Yeah. Jerry's the original "mellow fellow."*

AG: I agree. But it made for a good time.

JM: *So, the WildStar regular series?*

AG: Yes. Actually I've got a regular series in the works as well as another miniseries project but that's all I can say for now.

JM: *More news as it develops.*

JOE QUESADA

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *So what are you working on, Joe?*

Joe Quesada: Well, Joe, I'm doing *Ninjak* currently for Valiant and that's pretty much my main project. there was lots of promotion and advertising utilized to kick that off and the first issue should have been out by the time people are reading this.

JM: *What other people are involved in that?*

JQ: There's Mark Moretti, best known for his work on *Eternal Warrior* and there's my buddy, Jimmy Palmiotti, doing the inks. It's pretty much the same team, except for Mark, who did the *X-O Manowar* #0. I'm real happy with the project because I pretty much got everybody I wanted working on it. *Ninjak* is essentially a book based on espionage and intrigue and spies and ninjas. It's a high-action book and that's for sure. Ninjak is cool because he's so much like Batman in the fact that he has no powers. He simply relies on his intellect and skill.

JM: *After reading about Ninjak in **Deathmate** he seems to be a very sly, vindictive character.*

JQ: Essentially it's whatever it takes to get the job done. He's the kind of guy who is prepared for every sort of scenario. I don't know if he's quite as vindictive as he was in that issue of *Deathmate*. Ninjak is like Bruce Lee meets James Bond meets Batman. There's a lot of James Bond in this character.

JM: *Is it revealed at any time why he is the way he is?*

JQ: Not for a while. He's definitely not motivated by revenge so you can close the books on that but to say anything more would be cheating.

JM: *Okay. Any other things you have in the wings?*

JQ: No, not really. I have an assorted trading card here and there but that's pretty much it. Right now I am working on some model sheets for the new Batman and for Azrael because they're considering making a toy line. There's just little things like that.

JM: *I'm sure you've been approached by people.*

JQ: Yeah. But, you know, that's the state of this industry. There are too many good ideas and too few guys doing them. Right now, my plate is full. I always field calls though just to see what's going on but for now I'm really having a good time doing *Ninjak* and I plan on staying as long as I can on it.

JM: *Did you have more or less fun on the **Batman: Sword of Azrael** in comparison?*

JQ: Oh, gosh, that's really hard to say. They're two completely different books and I had just as much at stake on *Azrael* that I do on *Ninjak*. *Azrael* was a great project. I'm really proud of it. My level of enthusiasm for *Ninjak* is just as high. The thing I'm jazzed about is that I feel it really is my best work to date. I don't have Kevin Nowlan to rely on anymore to make me look good, though [laughs]. Jimmy is a fabulous inker but Kevin is amazing because he's actually a better penciller than I am. Actually, he's a better penciller than most people are.

JM: *Has your style changed a tad in the way you do things?*

JQ: I'm just learning how to draw. It's a learning process and I'm still learning from the mistakes I've made in the past... just educating myself daily. I generally tend to get bored with my pages a day or two after I finish them but I'm generally happy with this project.

JM: *How far ahead are you working?*

JQ: Right now I'm working on issue #2 but I should be on #3 by the time people read this. I'm running behind but not so much so the book is going to be shipping late. It's just a matter of keeping things in check. We pretty much have the first six issues plotted out and right around issue #5 we're going to have a great team-up with X-O Manowar which is one of the things I told Bob Layton that I really wanted to do.

JM: *Ninjak is going to be teaming up with other Valiant characters then?*

JQ: Oh, yeah. I just think that Ninjak and X-O is a natural team-up because Ninjak is average build, about 5' 11", and X-O, in his suit, is like 7 feet tall so this should make a very cool visual.

JM: *So **Ninjak** is an ongoing series?*

JQ: An ongoing monthly series; please make a point of stating that. At first people thought I was just doing the cover. Then, people thought I was only doing the first issue. Then, people thought it was a miniseries. No. I suppose my reputation precedes me at this point but it's an ongoing monthly series and I'm in it for the long haul.

DAVE DORMAN

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *Hey, Dave.*

Dave Dorman: Hey, Joe. I know what you're going to ask. I'm working on lots of stuff so I'm going to attempt to take them chronologically.

JM: *[Laughs] Thanks! So, this is going to be like a Dave Dorman checklist.*

DD: Yeah. What I've got on my board right now is a painting for Dark Horse promoting their *X* comic book. It's going to be a 22" x 34" poster. After this I'm going to paint two more covers for *Tales of the Jedi*. Talking in the long-term, after these covers I'm going to be doing the covers for *Dark Empire II*.

JM: *Oh, a second miniseries?*

DD: Yeah. The original creative team is back and I'm not going to tell you who the bad guy is but it's not Darth Vader. That six-issue series is tentatively scheduled for November of '94. It should be just as good, if not better, than the first series. Other things, I've got *Barkley Vs. Godzilla* which should be out before Christmas and, getting away from Dark Horse, I'm working on ten cards for the *Universal Monsters* trading card set. I'm also tentatively doing a back cover for Michael Allred's *Madman* and he's doing that through Dark Horse now so we're back with those guys again. That'll be fun.

JM: *Madman's great.*

DD: Yeah. He's a great character. Scott Hampton mentioned to me that he had a lot of fun doing his and when I talked to Michael (Allred) he told me that Geoff Darrow had just delivered his and it was real funny. My deadline on that is the 15th of December so I'm assuming that it will be out some time in the spring. I'm doing a *Dead Kid* cover for Sky Comics based on a creation by Tom and Mary Bierbaum and that will be a line drawing rather than a painting. My deadline on that is mid-December.

JM: *You get to ply your other trade a bit with that one.*

DD: Yeah.

JM: *You were doing Geoff Darrow before Geoff Darrow; real precise detail stuff. You add a lot of small bits and pieces and people take more time to look at something like that.*

DD: Well, I have fun when I get to do that kind of work. It also has to do with the fact that because I'm doing single pieces instead of telling a story I can put a little more into it. A lot of detail tends to slow you down when you're telling a story. In *Hard Boiled* there was almost no story so Geoff had time to play with it and the readers had time to look at everything and still follow the story.

JM: *Also there's the case if a lot of script is involved then I would suppose that many details can get covered up by word balloons and such.*

DD: That's very true. Let's see... what else? I did a trading card for Nelson's *Eudaemon* card set under Manta which is his own company. I did three cards for the *Ultraverse II* set for Skybox which is out in February. I did some *X-Men* cards for the Fleer *X-Men* set.

JM: *Wow. You're spotting out there with everybody.*

DD: Yeah. Let's see... I'm doing the cover for one more *Aliens* paperback that's coming out and there's another paperback called *The Pale Companion* by Berkeley/ Ace. Oh, and I'll be doing a *Flintstones* cover.

JM: ***Flintstones?***

DD: Yeah. It's for Harvey Comics.

JM: *How are you going about that one?*

DD: I don't know [chuckles]. I'm not going to make it realistic. It'll be very animated. I'm going to have fun with it. It probably won't look like anything I've ever done before. It might be close to some of the *Robotech* things I did earlier on but that was five years ago so I've progressed some since then. Scott Hampton just did a *Jetsons* cover for those guys and he had a lot of fun with it. A couple of long-term projects that are in the works... I'm doing a 98-card set based on Malibu's Ultraverse. They'll be fully painted and Skybox is going to publish it. It takes me about a day to do a card so that will comprise a bit of my time. That set will be out right before the '94 San Diego show but my due date is sometime in April.

JM: *That sounds like a mad rush.*

DD: Well, I plan on pacing myself. I don't want to end up doing any sloppy cards like Joe Jusko did for Marvel. You could look at that set and tell right away which ones he rushed on with that. That shouldn't be apparent in the set I'm doing. Malibu is giving me a lot of leeway in the creativity of these cards so I'll be taking an artistic tact with some of them. Some will be close-ups of heads and shoulders and stuff like that, some will be full figures and some will be a shadowy "Dave McKean" type of thing. I like Joe Jusko's work but when you put the first *Marvel Masterpieces* side-by-side it sort of flows all together. What I'm doing will be different. Every card will vary a bit in layout and style. Tentatively I'm also working on a *Batman* graphic novel project. It will be fully painted.

JM: *That's quite an undertaking... what am I talking about? Everything you're doing is quite an undertaking.*

DD: Pretty much. But that will be a real fun thing to do. I can't say what format it will be or who else will be working on it yet. Right now it's just a matter of working out the finances with DC. That's a project I can hopefully start on after the Malibu cards. It won't be released, I would figure, until sometime in 1995.

JM: *Very good.*

DD: Oh, I'm forgetting one of the most important things!

JM: *What's that?*

DD: I have an exclusive license with Lucasfilms to produce limited edition prints of my *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* artwork through my company, Rolling Thunder Graphics.

JM: *Not through Dark Horse.*

DD: Right!

JM: *You hear that Diamond?*

DD: [Laughs] Yes, I solicited that a couple months ago and Diamond stuck it under Dark Horse licensing. These prints have nothing to do with Dark Horse. It's my own exclusive licensed project. We'll be producing two *Star Wars* prints and two *Indiana Jones* prints over the course of '94. Actually, the first *Star Wars* print will be shipping in December of this year. I think they're 20" x 26" and they'll be a limited edition museum quality print, signed and numbered. There will be approximately 1,500. These are somewhat similar to the *Aliens/ Predator* print that was released.

JM: *People will be looking for that.*

DD: Well, I hope so.

MARC SILVESTRI

by Joe Martin

Joe Martin: *Congratulations on Cyberforce #1. It looks great.*

Marc Silvestri: Thanks. Issue #2 should be out in a couple of weeks. We've finally got everything together and we're cruising.

JM: *Excellent. So, what's going on with Cyberforce that you can tell us?*

MS: Well, there's the Homage crossover thing that Jim (Lee) and I are doing. It all will start in the pages of *WildC.A.T.S.* #6, then carries into *Cyberforce* #2, then *WildC.A.T.S.* #7 and then concludes in *Cyberforce* #3. It's one storyline that weeds its way through those four books. It's not one of those things where you just happen to make reference to the other guy's team like, "Oh, I see WildC.A.T.S. around the corner there!" It's one story where you definitely have to go from one book to the other.

JM: *Readers shouldn't have any problem with that since most of your readers, if not all, read both titles already.*

MS: Yeah, that's good. We're actually pretty happy with the storyline and I don't think we'll disappoint anybody with it. After that crossover hopefully we'll have a special announcement to make. I can't say what it is yet but it'll happen in *Cyberforce* #4 and #5. After that I'm going to concentrate on a lot of character development in the storyline now that I'm not limited to a finite number of issues. My brother and I definitely want to start focussing more on the characters. The "soap opera" stuff is really my favorite stuff to do anyway. We'll probably start by focussing a lot on the Ballistic character and Velocity and then each of the others in turn.

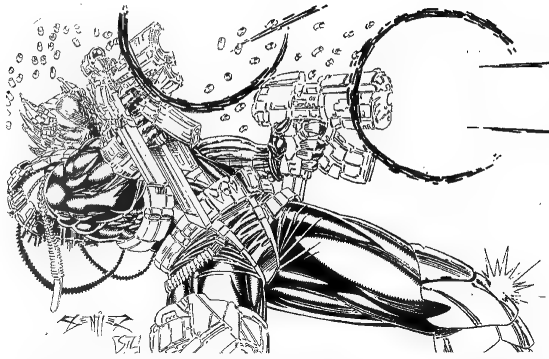
JM: *Character development is always fun to read.*

MS: Yes. I think it's really interesting.

Also, periodically throughout the year, I'll be putting out miniseries'. These will pair up the Cyberforce characters. The first one will be a Cyblade and Heatwave teamup that will be three-issues. Every three to four months there will be a new one out. These will concentrate on just two characters at a time except for the *Ripclaw* miniseries.

JM: *Which is being worked on by Jordan Raskin and Kevin Nowlan.*

MS: Actually there's two. Jordan is working on one that will end up being a prestige format one-shot and that gives him a lot of time to work on it. He's not swift, but I'm a believer that if you wait sometimes things come out better. That'll be out sometime near the end of '94. Before that comes out there will be a *Ripclaw*



three-issue miniseries by Greg Capullo fresh off of his *Spawn* stint.

JM: *I remember you were talking about doing something with him.*

MS: Yeah, I've always liked his work and he just keeps getting better.

He was really excited about doing it, too, which always helps. A good policy that Image has adopted, too, so that readers aren't waiting forever for #2 is that when the miniseries is done, then we'll solicit it so you can rest assured that when it is listed in the catalogues, it will be out on time. I'm estimating that the first issue of this will hit the stands sometime in May of '94.

In the immediate future we've got the *Codename: Strykeforce* book by Brandon Peterson. That'll be out at the end of December (of '93). The stuff looks great. It's knocking me out. That book is well on time, too. I was a little bit leary of it at first simply because I was writing something on my own that I wasn't drawing.

JM: *It's probably interesting to see how Brandon interprets it compared as to how you see what you've written in your own mind.*

MS: Yeah. Strangely enough, it's not that far off.

JM: *Well, you guys do a lot of things similarly.*

MS: Yes. I'm not complaining!

JM: *So, what else? Anything else?*

MS: Yes, yes, yes. I've got another miniseries coming up called *Weapon Zero*. That's going to be an initial three-issue miniseries and if response is good enough then it'll become a regular ongoing series. The art team is by a new guy named Joe Benitez who hasn't done anything professionally before. I think he's going to be a big hit. He's got a really good sense of dynamic storytelling. Mark Pennington, whose done a lot of *X-Men* titles, will be doing the inks.

I've got more. Uh, there's another project being done by Joe Madureira who comes off of the *Deadpool* miniseries and *Vanguard* #3 for Erik (Larsen).

JM: *I like his stuff.*

MS: Oh, yeah! He's doing one of two projects which I've offered to him. He's committed to doing something. It's either going to be a project featuring a new character called *The Darkness*, which is a single character title, or he will be doing the miniseries that we talked about before featuring Cyblade and Heatwave. The only reason he's indecisive is because he wants to do the single character thing just to be involved from the onset but he's also got this thing for Cyblade [chuckles].

JM: *Who doesn't? Why not do both?*

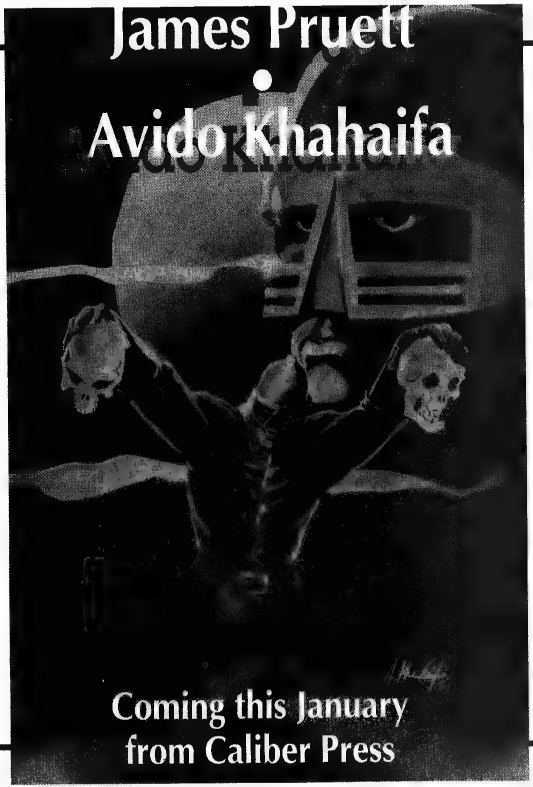
MS: Hey, I told him he could do both. I'm just really happy that he's going to be working with me. he just sent me a pin-up of Velocity that I got today and it's going to be in the *Art of Homage* book out in December.

So, anyway, we've got a full docket and we're committed to having these things come out when they're supposed to. We're hunting down some top name writers and such and we're just, uh, cruising along.

JM: *Sounds like a full plate.*

MS: Well, I love what I'm doing.

BLACK MIST



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THE BIG EVENTS OF 1993:

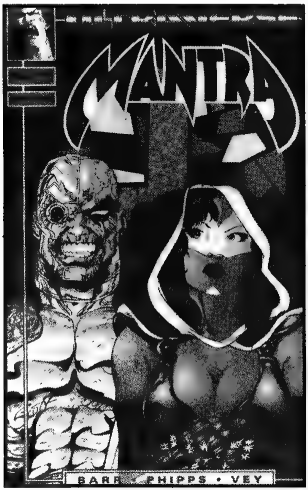
SUCCESSES & FLOPS, WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DID NOT

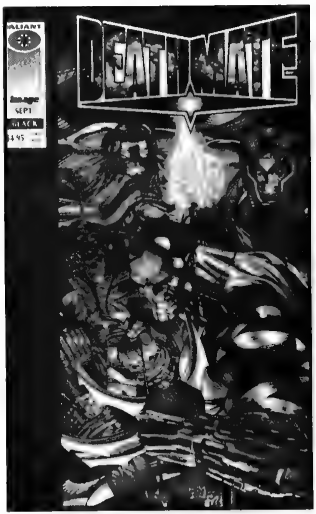
by Steve Stegelin

AND, WITH AN EXPLOSION, 1993 draws to a close. The comic racks are stuffed to capacity with new universes which were simply glimmers of imagination in someone's eye at the beginning of the year. Eyes light up and wallets whimper at the sight of each new dosage of four-color madness, promising the possibility of something interesting and the chance of grabbing onto the "Next Big Thing."

IN A BLAZE of advertising ranging from television commercials to bus-stop benches, perhaps the most bally-hooed new universe was **Malibu's Ultraverse**, from the start tagged as the "writer's universe" featuring such scribes as Gerard Jones, Mike W. Barr, Len Strazewski, Steve Gerber, Larry Niven, James Hudnall, and James Robinson. Teaming up with popular artists like Norm Breyfogle, Cully Hamner, Aaron Lopresti, Jeff Johnson, George Perez, and Darick Robertson, the Ultraverse promised interesting characters and a super-tight continuity. And, much like any other superhero universe, some characters proved to be interesting (*Prime, Mantra, Firearm*) while others were found to be lacking (*Strangers, Prototype*)... but most importantly, the Ultraverse has managed to capture the attention and imagination of its readers, and has become one of the successes of 1993, showing that it has the staying power necessary to keep its place on the crowded comic racks.

ANOTHER SUPERHERO UNIVERSE which flew onto the racks in a blizzard of talk and hype was **Dark Horse's Comics Greatest World**. Featuring a new character each week at a pocket-friendly price of one dollar a book, Dark Horse set out to introduce sixteen new concepts over sixteen weeks. Comics Greatest World started off with a furor and finished with a shrug, leaving their audience apparently uninterested after the hype died down. Certain heroes are finding homes in





new ongoing series, such as *Out of the Vortex*, *X*, and *Catalyst*. Only time will tell if these titles can keep Comics Greatest World alive, but judging from fan-interest towards the end of the sixteen week run, Comics Greatest World may very well flop into the wayside this time next year.

PERHAPS THE TWO COMPANIES fans have to blame for the sudden explosion of super-hero universes on the marketplace are Valiant and Image. 1993 proved to be an interesting year for these two publishers, at least as far as the lives of their creators. Valiant founder Jim Shooter created his own company, Defiant, and hot-artist Joe Quesada returned home to the Valiant stable with the much anticipated *Ninjak*. Image founder Rob Liefeld took off on a sabbatical, and Todd McFarlane for the time being handed over his Spawn to Grant Morrison and Greg Capullo as he works with Frank Miller on a Spawn/Batman crossover and to debate critic Peter David. Much of the "second generation" Image creators were given the boot from the imprint, forced to seek new homes, with some, like *Tribe*, finding it in self-publishing. The big hype event for both companies, however, was their joint-company crossover, **Deathmate**. After much talk and excitement, the *Deathmate Prologue* hit the shelf... and then Valiant's contribution *Deathmate Yellow*... then Valiant's *Deathmate Blue*... and then, much to no one's surprise, Image's contributions failed to appear when they were supposed to... and got later... and later...and later... until finally Image and Homage Studio's *Deathmate Black* appeared on the shelf... and then Image's *Deathmate Epilogue* shipped before Image and Extreme Studio's *Deathmate Red*! Perhaps it was the long delay between the Valiant contributions and the Image issues that caused the interest in what was at one time the "Next Big Thing" to drop away, or perhaps it was the fact that the ending came out before the story was completely told that caused what could have been a roaring success to be just "another flop" of '93.

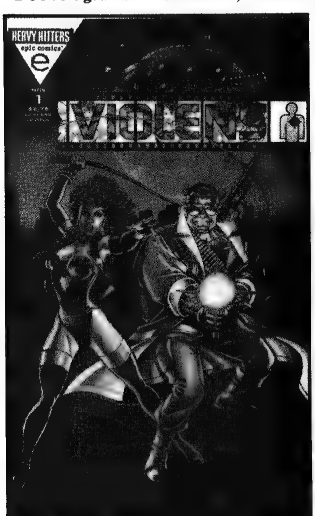
THE BIG EVENT IN COMICS that caused the industry to catch the eye of the rest of the world was the **Death of Superman**, appearing in newspapers, TV news and buzzing around the various entertainment forums, bringing a whole new audience into the world of comics. The storylines weaving the tale, "Doomsday", "Funeral For a Friend", "Reign of Superman", and the subsequent "Return of Superman" kept the interest of both new and die-hard comics fans with a well-told and very entertaining story, proving to be one of the success stories of 1993, and a boon for the industry in the process. The interest and the audience generated by the Death and Return of Superman continues to gather momentum not only on the original *Superman* titles, but also with the resulting spin-off titles,

Superboy, *Supergirl*, and *Steel*.

Hot on the heels of the "Death of Superman," **Knightfall** looked to be another success for DC's court, as the *Batman* mythos got their chance to be messed with, and a new Batman assumed the cape and cowl. And while interest was strong at the start of the storyline, interest began to wane when Knightfall became Knightquest and Gotham City found itself with a new caped crusader... a caped crusader who has failed to capture the heart and attention of the fans. This lack of interest in the new Batman has some looking forward to the hopeful return of the one true "Batman Classic", Bruce Wayne (remember New Coke?). The subsequent spin-offs, *Catwoman* and *Robin*, however, have proven to be of more interest than the storyline which birthed them.

The other big storyline for DC was their big annual crossover event, **Bloodlines**. In the tradition of the new universes popping up on the shelf, DC took it upon themselves to create new superheroes to crowd their already overpopulated universe. The result was too many characters and not enough characterization involved in a lackluster storyline. Only the interest derived from new spin-off titles *Animus* and *Gunfire* will determine whether or not the Bloodlines storyline is a total disappointment.

DC's **Vertigo** annual crossover event, *Children's Crusade*, though, did prove to be a very interesting and entertaining read, showing that it is possible to have such a crossover event successfully.



OVER AT THE MARVEL BULLPEN, the most anticipated event was the **Fatal Attractions** storyline which wove its way through the X-Titles. Featuring the return of Magneto, the defection of Colossus, and the downfall of Wolverine, fans were clamoring for the next installment... but were they more interested in the expensive hologram on the cover than the characters inside? Nevertheless, Fatal Attractions proved to have a very exciting storyline and successfully grabbed the interest of the readers, despite the hefty price tag attached to each issue.

Marvel also had some successful events that weren't attached to major storylines: Peter David and George Perez's *Sachs and Violens* looked good... too bad issue two won't be out until mid-1994. Also looking good is the painted *Marvels* series... too bad the $5.95 cover price is deterring a lot of readers. And hot new artist Steven Platt turned *Moon Knight*, of all titles, into a sudden collectible... too bad Image has reportedly snatched him up for *Prophet*.

The major disappointment from Marvel is that despite the already flooded market, they continued to pump new product onto the shelf. While evidence of attempts to fix this is starting to float to the surface, with titles being weeded out and the Marvel UK line cutting back, is it too little too late? For all the Marvel merchandise on the market, they should have had far more success than this.

ALSO OF NOTABLE SUCCESS: Bone finally got its well-deserved recognition in the marketplace. More creator-owned universes were made concrete, Dark Horse's Legends and Malibu's Bravura among the most notable. Sky Comics signed up Tom and Mary Bierbaum and Brad Gorby and entered the full-color superhero universe foray, starting with *Seeker* and *Blood and Roses*, and having *Dead Kid* and others waiting in the wings. Matt Groening and the Simpsons crew formed their own publishing company, Bongo Comics, to present the Simpsonsverse in comic form. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* started over with a new number one and did away with their black and white format. *Trencher* found a home away from Image with Blackball Comics along with Simon Bisley and Dave Elliot.

1993? THE YEAR OF CHOICES. New universes. Gimmick covers. And are the comics really @#&*ing worth less outside of the polybag? !!! Hopefully '94 will be simpler.

THE YEAR IN Preview

by Dwayne Haddix

The article to follow is purely based on my opinion and is in no way indicative of the opinion expressed by the illustrious people who publish this here mag... although my opinions might reflect their opinion, they can't say.

Who am I to give my opinions to you and think for one moment that they might be worth a damn? I'm only a reader. A comics fan who enjoys the medium purely for the sake of entertainment and the joy of reading. I've been delving into comics for almost ten years now and I think that makes me somewhat of an authority. I've written some stuff professionally, lettered some stuff professionally and even colored some stuff professionally so that gives me an even greater claim of significance, I would suppose.

I can't account for taste. Everybody's tastebuds are just a bit different from the next guy so read on, see if you agree or disagree and whatever. Hope you enjoy.

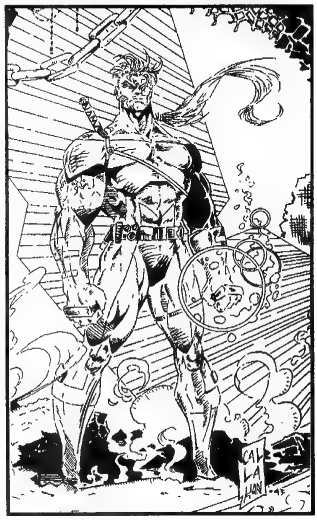
Axis Comics

These guys might be making waves in '94. Hot off their funds gathered from *Tribe* #1 and #2 from Image and Axis, respectively, Todd Johnson and Larry Stroman have put together a budget for the launch of their titles in the coming year. I don't know much but I'm sure we'll see something in the March issue of *Axis Alpha* which premieres their first four titles.

What I do know is that Beau Smith, Jim Callahan from Malibu's *Hardcase* and Tim Dzon from Marvel's *Avengers West Coast* are hard at work on the first Axis release, *DethGrip*. Another title, *W*, is by two hot newcomers both named Brian whose last names I haven't gathered. W is a group of elite assassins-for-hire that go by the code names of What, When, Why, Where and Who with a computer named How. Not much has been disclosed as of this time but I've spoken with Todd Johnson and these characters' powers are really cool.

Other names rumored to be working or signing to do tentative work are Joe Phillips, Tom Raney, Keith Giffen and Jason Pearson, among others.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *DethGrip; W;*



Bongo Comics

You've heard of the DC Universe, and then the Ultraverse, not to mention the Barkerverse but how about... The Simpsonverse? That's right. You've probably already helped yourself to a sampling by spending your hard-earned dollars on *Itchy & Scratchy* #1 and *Simpson's Comics* #1 (with a tribute to the first cover of Marvel's *Fantastic Four* way back when) from Bongo Comics.

When Matt Groening first started out creating his simple adventures about a buck-toothed rabbit (well, I think it's a rabbit) with "Life In Hell," I'll bet he had no idea where this was going. He moved on with other creations, finally settling in with his parody of the contemporary modern-day working-class family, *the Simpsons*. What a success! This prime time animation that debuted on FOX instantly became all the rage. "Eat my shorts, man," became a nationwide catchphrase

easily recognized and equally despised by elementary school teachers everywhere.

After glancing through the aforementioned titles, my gut reaction? *Itchy & Scratchy*? Hmm. I'm not sure. I'm more than willing to try the second issue but the first left me thinking that this cat and mouse chase is best left where it was... as a brief glimpse of a cartoon within a cartoon, and that's just about it. On the other hand, *Simpson's Comics* #1 brings just about the same amount of entertainment I receive from the weekly animation itself, sans the wonderful actors' voices but I hear them almost just as well in this demented head o' mine anyway.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Simpson's Comics, Bartman, Radioactive Man, Itchy and Scratchy*

MUST HAVES!: *Simpson's Comics* -- if you love the show, you'll think this series from Bongo is rad! *Bartman* -- just because!

Bravura

Malibu Comics never ceases to amaze me. Just when I keep thinking that these guys should be almost running out of money (the way they spend it!), they pop up with yet another imprint line. This time, it's Bravura, their answer to creator-owned comics since the Great Image Comics Desertion of '92. Well, I keep forgetting that comics aren't the only thing they're involved with anymore having merged with a computer entertainment manufacturer and doing all kinds of filmmaking (i.e. Reel Comics). They're no longer truly Malibu Comics but Malibu Entertainment, Inc., or something like that.

Bravura debuts with Jim Starlin's *Breed*, which is slated to run about 18 issues over the next two years. This will be followed immediately by Howard Chaykin's *Power & Glory*. Tom Mason, the Line Editor for Bravura, states, "If anyone can turn the super-hero mythos inside out, it's Howard Chaykin..." Now, I'll be the first to admit that I haven't been a Chaykin fan since the days of *American Flagg* (particularly disliking the *Fire-arm* covers for #1 and #2 he did for the Ultraverse because -- this sounds petty -- he gave that character some kind of wonky "fondu" haircut that would make me laugh at the guy instead of be impressed by him!) but I'm still tempted to check this one out.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: Jim Starlin's *Breed*, Howard Chaykin's *Power & Glory*, Steven Grant and Gil Kane's *Edge* [4 issues], Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar* written by Peter David [6 issues], Walt Simonson's *Star Slammers* [5 issues].

MUST HAVES!: *Dreadstar* -- Peter David should be able to take this old character and bring him to new heights! *Star Slammers* -- I'm looking forward to seeing Walt Simonson cut loose with his own creator-owned title!

Caliber/ Stabur

One of the major movers I predict for '94 will be Caliber Press. After the merger with Stabur, they will definitely be increasing their market presence. An increased budget will enable them to reach a wider audience and the ties that the Stabur Corporation have strengthened over the years have now become theirs.

In particular, I'm talking about the Todd McFarlane comic line. Yes, you heard correctly. Caliber/ Stabur will be the distributor of Todd McFarlane's comics that will be available exclusively through Wal-Mart stores (sorry, retailers!). Wal-Mart have already placed their order for 250,000 copies of Todd McFarlane's *Boof* illustrated by Topps Comics' John Cleary. If you checked out *Satan's Six* from Topps, you'll know why -- this guy draws more like McFarlane than Stephen Platt will ever hope to. If you don't believe me then go and check out *Boof* for

yourself. It's about some kind of human/ demon bulldog-like character with his boy-child friend. That's all I can say.

Gary Carlson, you may know him as Erik Larsen's friend (but he'd rather you call him Gary Carlson), who wrote and co-created *Vanguard*, will be heading up Caliber's line of super-hero comics with a mixture of Golden Age, Silver Age and Modern Age heroes debuting simultaneously. This line will be called Big Bang and will be "a wholly self-contained universe." Experience the '40s adventures of Ultiman, Knight Watchman, The Blitz, Thunder Girl and Doctor Weird in *Big Bang* #1 as well as Jim Starlin's art in the *Doctor Weird Special* #1. According to Caliber publisher Gary Reed, "...toy deals have already been signed and look for the Big Bang action figures in Toys R Us and Kaybee Toys by mid '94."

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: Todd McFarlane's *Boof* -- only at Wal-Mart; *Young Dracula* trade paperback -- Count Dracula told by Gary Francis and David Mack as never before... we're talking big here; *Deadworld*; *Negative Burn*.

MUST HAVES!: *Boof* -- jeez! I told ya' already!; *Big Bang* -- highly recommended for fans of the Golden and Silver Age.

Chaos! Comics

Chaos! Comics cut a swathe into the industry this past summer, heaving into reader's laps with the egregious Evil Ernie, a proven cult favorite by far. Evil first made his first kill in the pages of a four-issue miniseries from Malibu Comics and upon shipping of that, the contract expired and Malibu opted not to renew because of the coming on board of the Marvel-Less Seven, whom, at that time, Malibu felt was their up and coming ticket to success. Since then, Evil Ernie creator and Chaos! publisher Brian Pulido and series artist Steven Hughes have taken this dead teenage bad boy to new heights, capturing a print run with *Evil Ernie* #1 (from Chaos!) of over 50,000 copies! Unbelievable! (So don't believe those Lightning Comics guys when they tell you they hold the small independent debut circulation record with 36,000 copies of *Bloodfire* #1).

This is one company to watch with both eyes open as Brian told me that he plans to do "a great many things" in the months to come. I'm afraid I didn't get any specifics at that time but I'm sure it will be something more than wicked... it'll be Evil!

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Lady Death* [3 issues]

MUST HAVES!: *Lady Death* -- of course! This three-issue mini, as well as being a good time, will probably reveal a lot behind the carnage and mayhem that is the Chaos! universe.

Continuity Comics

I'm not a Continuity fan. All I know is that this company is comprised of a lot of Neal Adams clones (although it seems that lately they've been getting away from that a bit) that ship their books consistently late. They've put out a couple Michael Golden covers so I can't complain about that but what is it with this Tyvek stuff? You know -- the "indestructible covers" manufactured from the same stuff that the post office makes some of their express mail envelopes from. I don't like it, but to each his own.

I don't know what kind of circulation Continuity is getting but it appears to me that they keep relying on crossover after crossover like Deathwatch 2000, The Rise of Magic and the now extinct She-Bat/ Spawn crossover just to keep the readers enthralled. I may not be one to give Neal Adams advice but how much longer can he afford to do this? Sir, please, if you want to get some respectable numbers, hire some pros with names, quite relying on Peter Stone to write everything and lose the Tyvek.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Knighthawk the Protector*: Neal Adam's newest hero; "Rise of Magic" crossover featuring the first appearance of Shaman

MUST HAVES!: ???

Dark Horse Comics

Are you ready for a little excitement? Don't "snap into a Slim Jim!" Check out Dark Horse's newest imprint, Legend. If you haven't heard of it yet (you must've been on the other side of the

moon), it was all the furor at '93's San Diego convention. Legend is Dark Horse's answer to creator-owned comics! Do you think that this is catching on or what? Everywhere you turn, comics are creator-owned! If Image Comics has done one thing right, it's opened the door for this sort of thing.

Legend is comprised of seven men (sound familiar?)... seven "legends" so to speak: Frank Miller, John Byrne, Art Adams, Mike Mignola, Paul Chadwick, Dave Gibbons and Geoff Darrow. This is something to look forward to. The "heydays" of comics have returned.

In reality, we've already seen the coming out of Legend with John Byrne's *Next Men: Faith* miniseries which actually slips right into the *JB:NM* regular series. Follow this with Frank Miller's *Sin City II: A Dame To Kill For.*

Those guys aren't stopping there, however. *Danger Unlimited* has been acclaimed as John Byrne's answer to the *Fantastic Four* and the way "it should be." I've already seen the first issue and it is spectacular.

Art Adams has his answer to *Angel and the Ape* with *Monkey Man and O'Brien*. I have a feeling that this is going to be really good -- Art at his best. If only he can keep on a regular schedule. Dark Horse, don't let him get away with slacking off! This guy is much too good to keep teasing us with sporadic releases.

The same goes for Geoff Darrow on Frank Miller and Geoff Darrow's *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot*. This guy's detailed pens are going to unleash a whole new eye-stopping, heart-pounding, holy-crap-there's-a-lot-going-on-here! world and with Miller on board and driving, we're in for one hell of a ride.

I think, needless to say, that I could tell you that about almost every Legend title -- the quietest of these obviously being Paul Chadwick's *Concrete*, which is not a bad thing.

The first release spawning from last summer's Comics Greatest World was *Out of the Vortex* (plug: *Out of the Vortex* #4 has a Dave Dorman pen and ink cover -- watch for it!) and the second will be *X*, which was a very intriguing Batman/ Punisher-type character that I'm wanting to learn more about. Throughout the four issues (maybe more?) that he made his debut, the character obviously didn't have enough exposure, so to speak, to evolve, being that the story was the primary concern. Here's the chance.

Another title that will be coming out of the sixteen-issue extravaganza as far as I last heard will be *Division 13*.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: John Byrne's *Next Men* and *Danger Unlimited*; Frank Miller's *Sin City*; Arthur Adams' *Monkey Man and O'Brien*; Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*; Frank Miller and Geof Darrow's *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot*; Comic's Greatest World's next ongoing series, *X*.

MUST HAVES!: What must you haven't? Legend is, in my unadulterated opinion, the biggest thing on the horizon. If you don't pick these up, you're nuts.

DC Comics

DC Comics comes out of a tailspin. That is without a doubt an accurate summation of what these guys went through this past year. When Image Comics released and jammed onto the scene with their major hits, it wasn't so much Marvel Comics who felt the blow but DC Comics. For the first time in decades, DC was

laid into the number three spot for a couple months instead of the number two spot. The company that gave birth to such American icons as Superman and Batman was reeling. Rumors hurled from mouth-to-mouth about what this company was going to do... "DC's going out of business!" or "Man, I heard that DC is going to quit publishing super-heroes and just do Vertigo stuff...". Well, that certainly wasn't true as the powers that be brainstormed and concocted the most dastardly (and marketable) schemes known to man... the death of Superman.

Of course, all of that is past now and this column certainly isn't about the year in review so what's looking ahead for DC Comics? For starters, we'll see a new Green Lantern, Lobo gets his own series (finally), Superboy is back (sort of), Supergirl is back (sort of), Doomsday is back (definitely), some characters that sprang from the Bloodlines annuals are getting their own books, the Looney Tunes return to comics and the *Zero Hour* has come upon us.

The *Zero Hour* is the new and updated DC Crisis on Infinite Earths for the '90s powerfully written and drawn by Dan Jurgens. It's going to run for six issues and according to Jurgens "will unite DC's most powerful heroes on a mission with dire consequences in a struggle for their very existence. This series will shake the entire DC universe to its very soul!"

Lightning strikes again as the "mightiest mortal on the planet" makes his return in *The Power of Shazam*. Beautifully illustrated and written by Wild Super-scribe Jerry Ordway, this hardcover graphic novel will be well worth the cost as it details startling new insights into the history of Captain Marvel. This sets the stage for the forthcoming ongoing monthly series.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: Jerry Ordway's *The Power of Shazam* hardcover graphic novel; *The Books of Magic* -- new Vertigo ongoing series; *Swamp Thing* -- a new direction with the first story co-written by Grant Morrison; *Lobo* -- the Main Man's new ongoing series; *Superboy* -- the Boy of Steel's new ongoing series; *Steel* -- the armored Superman's new ongoing series; *Black Lightning* -- a new ongoing series updated for the '90s; *Green Lantern* -- Hal Jordan goes insane and a new Green Lantern must be found to stop him; *Zero Hour* -- DC's new *Crisis on Infinite Earths*; *Doomsday* -- this mini-series is round two of the Superman/Doomsday battle with secrets of Doomday's past; *Gunfire* -- New Blood character with a new ongoing series; *Anima* -- yet another New Blood character with a new ongoing series; *Sandman* -- issue 57 will be the start of the final story arc for this ongoing series.

MUST HAVES!: *Lobo* -- the Main Man provides hours of endless, agonizing enjoyment; *The Power of Shazam* -- with Jerry Ordway, it's got to be good; *Sandman* #57 -- this begins the final story arc of Neil Gaiman's finite series; *Zero Hour* -- the DC universe will feel the impact of this major storyline for the '90s.

Defiant

Jim Shooter will be leading his new company into the forefront with *War Dancer*, a character created by Alan Weiss struggling to cope with his new identity (War Dancer, not Weiss). War Dancer is originally from the world of Plasm, can literally become an energy being and is roughly the equivalent of Valiant's *Solar, Man of the Atom*, in their universe. He takes on a very pivotal relationship with the Defiant universe.

Then there is *Prudence and Caution* written by former *X-Men* great Chris Claremont. This is about a female character from Plasm (Prudence) and one of the original five Earthlings that were brought to Plasm by Lorca. This title will be heavy Claremont as you've always wanted him but not seen him (lately, at least).

Defiant is looking ahead to other projects but very little solid info has been gathered at this point.

Jim Shooter has said that he is looking forward to doing some creator-owned projects. Nothing

at this time has been revealed.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *War Dancer* -- another new ongoing series from Jim Shooter; *Prudence and Caution* -- a new series by Chris (X-Men) Claremont.

MUST HAVES!: *War Dancer, Prudence and Caution.*

Eclipse

Eclipse? We haven't seen anything substantial from these guys in a while except, of course, the *Miracleman* stuff by Gaiman. '94 will begin Eclipse's return to superhero comics with *Miracleman* monthly! That's right. Look for a more mainstream take on the hero.

Beau Smith and Brad Gorby have their hands full. Not only will you be seeing the *Parts Unknown II* miniseries on store shelves in a matter of weeks but they'll be following that with Eclipse's own superhero group book, *The G.R.I.P.*!

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Miracleman*; *Aviator X* -- featuring the return of Airboy who is older and very pissed off; *Black Terror* --a new mini-series that will crossover with Dark Horse's *The Mark* character; *The G.R.I.P* -- Beau Smith and Brad Gorby's new superhero team; *Parts Unknown II* --space aliens vs. humans, round two!

MUST HAVES!: *Miracleman* -- as always, you can count on well-written, thought provoking stories from Neil Gaiman; *The G.R.I.P.* -- nobody can tweak your nodes and bust your buns like Beau Smith and Brad Gorby, period.

Image Comics

What can I say about Image that hasn't been said already? Great art, terrible shipping schedule. Although most of the stories range from bad to mediocre, some I wholeheartedly enjoy. I am not a particular fan of Extreme Studios. Their books are like cotton candy -- they look pretty and taste good but in the end you get a stomach ache. The only title I read from that pubescent gang of famed folks is *Prophet*, which I quite like, and I hear tell that *Supreme* isn't half bad, however the rest reflect lots of glitz and little substance.

Homage Studios has its ups and downs but the two creators I most believe deserve the praise are Erik Larsen and Todd McFarlane. They've both done an admirable job of high quality and on-time delivery. Maybe it's a bit easier to tell a story highlighting one character as opposed to a group but *Savage Dragon* and *Spawn* are my top two Image choices and I'm reasonably convinced that many of you agree.

Okay, so what's forthcoming?

Well, Erik Larsen is going to have his hands full. In addition to *Dragon*, he'll be releasing Freak Force with Vic Bridges doing pencils and Karl Story on inks and there's a second *Superpatriot* miniseries in the works with the same creative team (Giffen and Johnson).

Todd McFarlane will be enduring with the ever-flourishing *Spawn* as well as applying his talents with Frank Miller on the *Spawn/ Batman* crossover. Todd's also got Bart Sears "engrossed" in the *Violator* miniseries.

Jim Valentino is moving right along with *Shadowhawk III* and is releasing *The Pact* -- a renegade group of super-heroes on the run from the government -- by Walter McDaniels and Matt Banning, *J.P. Slaughter* -- the ultimate hired arsenal -- by Chris Wozniak, and *The Others* -- one of Earth's most guarded secrets is revealed in this subterranean adventure -- by Scott Kolins and Jon Holdredge.

Dale Keown is doing *Pitt*... sometimes.

Homage sees Jim Lee staying on top of the *WildC.A.T.S.* scene as well as heading up *StormWatch* by Scott Clark and Scott Williams, *Gen 13* by Jefferey Scott and Alex Garner and *Kindred* by Brett Booth and Sal Regla. Marc Silvestri will be pulling out the stops in *Cyberforce* as well as *Codename: Strykeforce* with Brandon Peterson and the someday up and coming *Ripclaw* miniseries that Jordan Raskin and Kevin Nowlan are trudging (and I do mean trudging) away on.

Extreme Studios has Rob Liefeld doing a bit of everything. I have no idea what new stuff these guys have coming but, again, *Prophet* is really good.

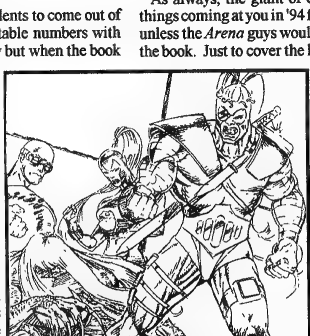
UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Freak Force* -- Erik Larsen's new team book; *Superpatriot II* -- Keith Giffen and Dave Johnson return to knock your socks off!; *Kindred* -- a

miniseries that crossovers *WildC.A.T:S.* (Grifter) and *StormWatch* (Backlash); *Violator* -- the Spawn villain by Bart Sears; *Spawn/Batman* -- one of the most-looked-forward-to crossovers by Frank Miller and Todd McFarlane; *Pitt?* -- who knows; *Wetworks* -- Whilce Portacio's long awaited series debuts in '94; *WildStar* -- Al Gordon returns with a n ongoing series and a new artist (hush,hush); *J.P. Slaughter* -- the Woz is kicking butt.

MUST HAVES!: *Freak Force, Superpatriot II, Kindred, Violator, Spawn/Batman, Ripclaw, WildStar* as well as the regulars: *Prophet, Spawn, Savage Dragon, WildC.A.T.S., Cyberforce* and *Shadowhawk*!

Lightning Comics

One of the hottest independents to come out of '93. These guys sold respectable numbers with respectable marketing ability but when the book hit the stands, I'm afraid I laughed. The story wasn't half-bad but the art was extremely sub-standard and the coloring was "gawdy" (as in Gawd Awful). But they turned it out in time and that was their claim to significance. And they continued to ship their books on time. The storylines we're improving and, before long, so was the art. This last batch of stuff I looked at "didn't suck." As a matter of fact, recent copies are, well, quite good. The coming on of pencillers Terral Lawrence and Paul Abrams may save these guys from drowning. If these boys can keep treading water, they might just have something here.



Terral Lawrence artwork from Lightning.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Bloodfire*; *Perg*; *Judgment Day*; *Lightning Comics Presents* -- slated for a May release, this is essentially Lightning's '94 kick-off title; *War Party* -- an assassin-for-hire with a bad attitude; *Dreadwolf* -- Lightning's introduction into the "slash" hero genre.

MUST HAVES!: *Bloodfire* -- Lawrence's pencils are impressing me lately; *Perg* -- Paul Abrams is taking over as of #6.

Majestic

From those fellas and fell-ettes at Majestic, look for a continuance with their premiere title, *Legacy*, as well as the debut of *Stat, Heroes Like Us* and *Flashpoint*. This company surprised lots of people with their *Future Stars* card set which, I'm convinced, inspired the *Creators Universe* trading cards. I believe the formula that Majestic is subscribing to is to launch a series with an initial comic card set and then to go from there.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Heroes Like Us* -- a new ongoing series that is said to be Majestic's try at the *X-Men*; *Flashpoint* -- a series about a kid who becomes a hero to make a difference in his 'hood.

MUST HAVES!: *Heroes Like Us* -- so far, this seems to be the only one that catches my interest.

Marvel Comics

As always, the giant of comics has too many things coming at you in '94 for me to go over here, unless the *Arena* guys would allow me the rest of the book. Just to cover the highlights, here goes:

Cosmic Powers, showcasing six of Marvel's cosmic characters is a six-issue miniseries. The books feature Thanos, Terrax, Legacy, Jack of Hearts and Ganymede, Morg and Tyrant, respectively. Written by Ron Marz and featuring various respective talents.

Galactic Guardians is a four issue miniseries spinning off from (you guessed it) *Guardians of the Galaxy* written by Gregory Wright. Art team to be announced.

Forceworks is the answer to the cancelling of *Avengers West Coast*. It's by Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, Tom Tenney and Michael Avon-Dening.

War Machine spins off from Iron Man as James Rhodes falls in with world watch, a political activist organization. Written by Len Kaminski with art by Gabriel Gecko and Don Cameron.

Conan The Adventurer. Yes, Marvel couldn't withstand the barrage of complaints that followed when they cancelled *Conan the Barbarian* so here you have it... a new monthly color comic by Roy Thomas and Rafael Kayanan.

The *Marvel Universe Tech Guide* is a four-issue miniseries by the man who brought you the

Punisher Armory, Eliot R. Brown.

Northstar is getting his own four-issue mini by Simon Furman and Dario Carrasco, Jr.

Blade The Vampire Hunter. Creative team to be announced.

Blaze picks up with John Blaze after suffering a family tragedy. He severs ties with his co-Spirit of Vengeance and sets out with Larry Hama, Henry Martinez and Bud LaRosa to tell his tale.

Schizm is one of the new additions to Marvel's Razorline imprint written by Fred Burke and pencilled by the amazing Franchesco and Wraithheart is the other by Frank Lovece and with an art team as of yet undetermined.

Black Cat is getting her own four-issue miniseries by Terry Kavanaugh and another as of yet undetermined art team... hey, it might be you!

The Shroud is getting a four-issue miniseries but you're not doing it! This one is by Mike Barr, M.C. Wyman and Malcolm Jones.

Keep an eye out for the *Spider-Man/ X-Factor* limited series by Kurt Busiek and Pat Broderick.

Ghost Rider 2099 is "the hardest hitting 2099 title yet!" according to Marvel sources. Len Kaminski writes, Chris Bachalo pencils and Mark Buckingham inks. You know what? With a team like that I'd wager they may be right. I like Bachalo. He's good.

Deadpool is getting a second miniseries but Joe Madureira won't be there to pencil it. I hope Marvel takes a hint and doesn't let a hack artist make this character with so much potential, yucky. That would be bad.

Jean/Scott Honeymoon. What a creative title, huh? Well, that isn't set in stone but this four issue limited series promises to deliver since Scott Lobdell is scribing and Tom Lyle is etching. Another one to look forward to.

The ClanDestine by Alan Davis. Marvel UK has a hit for sure.

Punisher vs. Death's Head II by Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning and Bryan Hitch. Another hit for Marvel UK. Yup.

Last but not least, this final plug isn't for a title but for an artist by the name of Carlos Pacheco. I promised myself I wouldn't do this but I love the guy's work. You can pick it up by checking out Marvel UK's *Dark Guard* which is rumored to having been cancelled but I don't know why. Pacheco is great!

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Captain America* -- Cap finds out that the SuperSoldier serum is paralyzing him and must find a replacement; *Daredevil* -- the New DD has a hard time finding his place in the Marvel Universe; *Forceworks* -- the new Avengers West Coast led by the Scarlet Witch and the real Iron Man (Tony Stark); *The ClanDestine* -- Alan Davis' newest superteam comes to Marvel UK; *Beavis and Butt-Head* -- the comic book... it doesn't suck. Huh huh, huh huh; *X-Men* -- the long-awaited wedding of Scott (Cyclops) Summers and Jean (Marvel Girl) Grey which, in my opinion, is the biggest news coming from Marvel this year.

MUST HAVES!: *The ClanDestine* -- Alan Davis... 'nuff said; *Daredevil* -- as long as D.G. Chichester and Scott McDaniel is aboard; *Blaze*; *Ghost Rider 2099*; *The Incredible Hulk* -- Peter David and Gary Frank make an "incredible" team; *X-Men* and anything Carlos Pacheco draws!

Mirage

Mirage made their color debut in late '93 with *Usagi Yojimbo* and the new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Flaming Carrot* -- Eastman and Laird's creations team up with Bob Burden's for a romping good time;

MUST HAVES!: *Space Usagi*

Sky Comics

Who are these guys and where did they come from? I know that they're putting out some good

stuff. It remains to be seen whether they can keep it up or grab the readership that'll enable them to do it.

They've got a title called *Seeker* that was their premiere color debut. It wasn't a bad offering as far as color comics go from a generally unknown publisher and, hey, in addition to being well-written it was well-drawn by Willie Peppers (who's also busy slaving away for Malibu Comics on various titles) and Allen Freeman. The watercolors seemed a bit blotchy but hopefully that's not the norm and they'll work this problem out.

Following *Seeker* we'll see the debut of *Blood & Roses* in a story by Sky publisher Bob Hickey and drawn by Brad Gorby, who did a beautiful job on Eclipse's *Parts Unknown* with Beau Smith.

Dead Kid is Tom and Mary Bierbaum's creator-owned title. You may be familiar with the Bierbaums' *Legionnaires* work for DC Comics.

This is a definite company to keep your eyes on.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Seeker* -- Joe Martin has an ongoing series of adventure with this sword wielding heroine; *Tempered Steele* -- *Streetfighter* artist Don Hillsman illustrates Sky's electrifying super-hero; *Dead Kid* -- the writers of DC's *Legionnaires* take a stab at going independent; *StormQuest* -- the return of the Drifters, updated for the '90s; *Blood and Roses: Merger* -- these time-traveling warriors head into outer space; *Ashley Dust* -- Rick McCollum's metaphysical adventures.

MUST HAVES!: *Seeker; Tempered Steele, Dead Kid, Blood and Roses.*

Topps Comics

Topps is taking the Dark Horse formula to success by successfully licensing titles that may or may not make good comics. Nobody knows for sure until it's released. After debuting victoriously with their adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* followed by *Vlad the Impaler* and then the Kirbyverse, this comic company that sprang from years of manufacturing baseball cards has endured the summer glut and is ready to move on.

Everything is looking good for this company except that I have my doubts about them picking up Mark Schultz's *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* for the simple fact that Mark Schultz won't be doing the art. Instead those chores will be handled by an array of artists such as Dick Giordano, William Stout and more. I guess we'll have to wait and see.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Invaders From Mars*: Keith Giffen has signed on to write this modernized adaptation of this classic; *Zorro*: a new ongoing series of the classic hero with a darker edge; *ExoSquad*: The hit cartoon makes its comic debut written by Len Wein; *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*: New adventures with Jack Tenrec and Hannah Dundee in an untamed future

MUST HAVES!: *Zorro* -- why? Just pick up a couple and find out. You won't be disappointed.

Ultraverse

People had their doubts going into the summer that Malibu's Ultraverse was going to make it. Many picked Dark Horse's Comics Greatest World as the favorite of the two but as the titles released, Malibu proved to be the cut and clear victor of this bout. Their first wave of titles released with a roar and even though there were difficulties with the shifting of art chores on several of the debut titles that didn't seem to bother their readership too much. Now, everything has settled somewhat into place and these guys are preparing for the second wave... an artistic assault guaranteed to make you sit up and take notice.

Leading this off is Barry Windsor-Smith's *Rune*. Co-written by Chris Ulm and Windsor-Smith, this title is about a 1,500 year old vampire-of-sorts that has been introduced on the flip side of nearly every Ultraverse title. Barry has returned to his original method of rendering which was sacrificed to some extent when he was working at Valiant.

Wrath, by Mike Barr and David Ammerman, looks like it may be good. I much prefer Ammerman's work from what I've seen on this title in comparison to *Prototype*, which I didn't like much at all. And, of course, Mike Barr never disappoints (like Steve Englehart -- blah!).

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Rune*: Ongoing series by Barry Windsor-Smith; *Wrath*: Ongoing series by Mike Barr and David Ammerman; *Ultraverse Premiere*: First appearances of new Ultras like Warstrike and Masquerade in a new anthology book

MUST HAVES!: *Rune* -- without a doubt one of the aspiring hottest titles of '94; *Wrath*; *Hardcase* -- as always, very entertaining.

Valiant

I find it difficult to enjoy too many Valiant titles after hearing Jim Shooter's side of the story about the unfortunate break-up he had with these guys. Since then I've always perceived Steve Massarsky and Bob Layton as just a bit too shifty for my tastes. I will admit that I've only heard Shooter's side of the story and if either of these guys want to give me a call sometime to disclose their side, then, my good sirs, you are certainly invited!

But I can't argue with a good book and from Valiant I'm reading three of them. *Turok Dinosaur-Hunter*, *X-O Manowar* and *The Second Life of Dr. Mirage*. My friends, these are good books, hands down.

What is in the works for Valiant in '94?

We've seen the debut of *Ninjak* and I personally felt it didn't quite meet my expectations. Maybe Valiant hyped this book just a bit too much. Is that possible? Apparently for me. I'm willing to keep reading because I did enjoy it for the most part.

TimeWalker may prove to be good but I hera it is experiencing some difficulties. Evidently, the higher-ups at Valiant weren't happy with the first issue after it was turned in so it is being re-drawn. Eventually it'll get out there.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: *Shadowman:* The dark hero of Valiant comes into the spotlight with a trade paperback and #0 issue as well as his own book; *Rai and the Future Force*: Dave Ross begins as the new regular artist as the war with the Malev comes to a close; *Ninjak*: will Joe Quesada stay for more than a couple of issues?; *TimeWalker*: The middle brother of Eternal Warrior and Armstrong stars in his own ongoing timewalking adventures; *Armorines*: Valiant's new team to get their own book later in '94

MUST HAVES!: *Ninjak*; *Armorines* -- spinning off of X-O, this look promising; *X-O Manowar* -- as ever a good read; *TimeWalker* -- when it comes out; *Turok*.

WaRP

I love Wendy Pini's work but ever since these guys expanded, I haven't been able to keep up with all that's going on anymore. I suppose if this were a perfect world and I had my way, they never would have done it. Expanded, I mean. Wendy and Richard would still be unfolding their tales of life and love with our favorite Elven-kind and *Elfquest* would be the number one book in the industry. I understand the move financially but, gosh-darnit, I just seemed to be able to get into the old stuff a little more because of the anticipation... the thrill of the wait. But, times change. Oh, well. The stuff is still good.

UPCOMING TITLES TO WATCH: Richard and Wendy Pini's *ElfQuest* adds a chapter to the legends with *Wavedancers*, a six-issue miniseries about a band of underwater elves

MUST HAVES!: All of them, if you have the means.

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Brit Bits

News about Britain from a vacation in Spain!

by Paul Birch

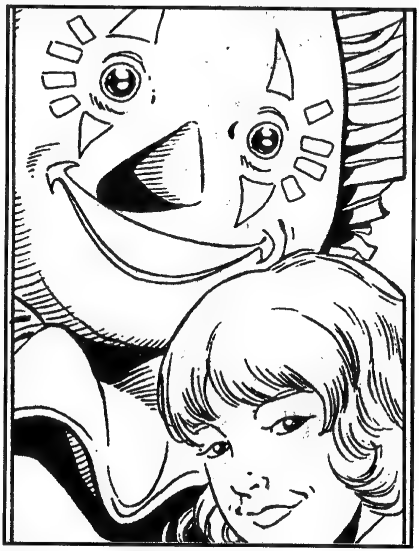
At a recent comic mart I had the pleasure of viewing the pencils for the first three issues of *The Tale of One Bad Rat* by Bryan Talbot. I am filled with admiration for the deft composition and intricate attention to detail which greatly enhance the emotional flavor of this book, covering the extremely difficult subject matter of child abuse. As the creators previously mentioned, it's intended for a mainstream audience, but if one needs a genre to hang it on, Bryan offered "magical realism." It's unlikely to appear from Dark Horse International until '94, but if the finished product's as good as what I've seen thus far, I really must implore you to pick it up.

Also at the comic mart was Hunt Emerson, who told me *Knockabout* will now go straight to graphic novel format with *Casanova*, rather than run it as a mini-series first.

What am I going to do with Mark Buckingham!? One minute he tells me he's going to stop inking and concentrate on penciling, next he's going to continue to do both! Aaargh!! Well, you'll be aware he's inking Bryan on *Sandman*, but what else has he got planned?

"I've finished inking the *Ghost Rider Annual* over Chris Bachalo and done a pin-up for it, a cover for #3 of the *Morbius*, reprint book, and I'm still doing a bit of *Miracleman*; there's going to be a second *Miracleman* book written by Fred Burke, by the way. I'm doing a couple of strips for *Red Dwarf Smegazine* written by Steve Noble. We plotted out a couple of stories on the plane up to the Glasgow convention, and Mike Butcher (editor) went for them; they'll only be about 4 pages so there's no tight schedule on. I'm penciling and inking the *Swamp Thing Annual* scripted by Nancy Collins – it all ties into "The Children's Crusade" Vertigo crossover story. Basically, there's an alternative world created by these runaway kids, and they've come to a point where they decide it might be a good idea to take all the children on Earth to this other world so they'll be safe because the Earth's in such a bad state." The story's two bookends will be written by Neil Gaiman. It's also likely that Mark's going to sign contracts for one or two major projects in '94; I know what they are, but I'm sworn to secrecy... but then again, I'm open to bribes!

The Marvel UK anthology, *Overkill*, has been given a much needed new lease of life by new Editor Jacqui Papp and Assistant Editor Alan Cowsill. Recent se-



rialized editions include *Black Axe* and *Super Soldiers*, whose artist Andrew Currie has drawn two fill-ins for *Avengers West Coast*.

Alan Cowsill describes the November due Red Mist 20/20 line of books as "fun to do." Edited by Michael Bennent, Cowsill is writing *Roidrage*, Simon Jowett *Blood Rush*, and the pair are co-writing *Death Duty*. The initial penciller for all three series is Andrew Currie. The first issues have interlocking covers by Chris Halls and come polybagged with cards.

Bennent's still manning the Frontier imprint, which'll have a big guns and humor title called *Heavy Weapon 911* out at the end of the year, plus there's *Frontier Unlimited* which will be a quarterly anthology.

More immediately from Marvel UK are four September releases:

Die-Cut by Glen Dakin and Bernard Custodio follows on from the June micro-series with Designer Gods -- built on Mars as part of the Manmaker Project -- going wild due to the effects of chaos theory. The Beast guest stars.

Motormouth and Killpower are given a second chance, in a series that promises to "leave Motormouth a changed character." This tale of a vacation turned inter-galactic romp is written by Andrew Cartmel with art by Rosie Mendoza and Jesus Redondo.

Captain Britain and the Silver Surfer are featured in *Plasmer*, scripted by Dakin with new Spanish discovery Pascual Ferry on art. The 4-issue series has Killpower's "mother," Dr. Oonagh Mularky, experimenting on herself (never a good idea in my opinion) and splitting into two super-powered beings. Against the back-drop of Mys-Tech's plans to revive a WWI killer robot, the doctor's good half, Plasmer, has to try and reunite with her dark side, Mullarky.

Die-Cut Vs. G-Force is by Johns Freeman and Royle. G-Force is Professor Daniel Jones, who on exploring a wormhole with a Warheads troop is transformed into this "gravity defying character." He eventually teams with Die-Cut in an attempt to prevent the Cyberdrones transforming all life into cyborg form. It may be of interest to note that Freeman used to edit *Dr. Who Magazine*. As I write, Royle is well into the book's visual breakdowns and after completion of the series will plough straight into a 4-issue *Death Metal* mini-series. I'm so pleased to hear Mr. Royle's as busy as he is; I'll be making sure it's him buying the booze at this year's UKCAC convention.

Ian Edginton told me he'll be scripting two *Spider-Man 2099* fill-ins and is discussing the possibility of graphic novel work for Harper Collins. This should come as a relief to those who enjoyed *Aliens: Rogue* as Atomeka has put back the release date for *Kingdom of the Wicked* until January '94.

With Simon Bisley's 12 month contract to Kevin Eastman due to run out soon, it has to be said the future looks bleak indeed for Atomeka -- I hope my doubts are proved wrong!

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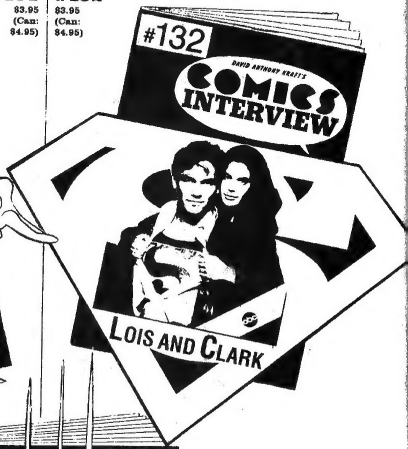

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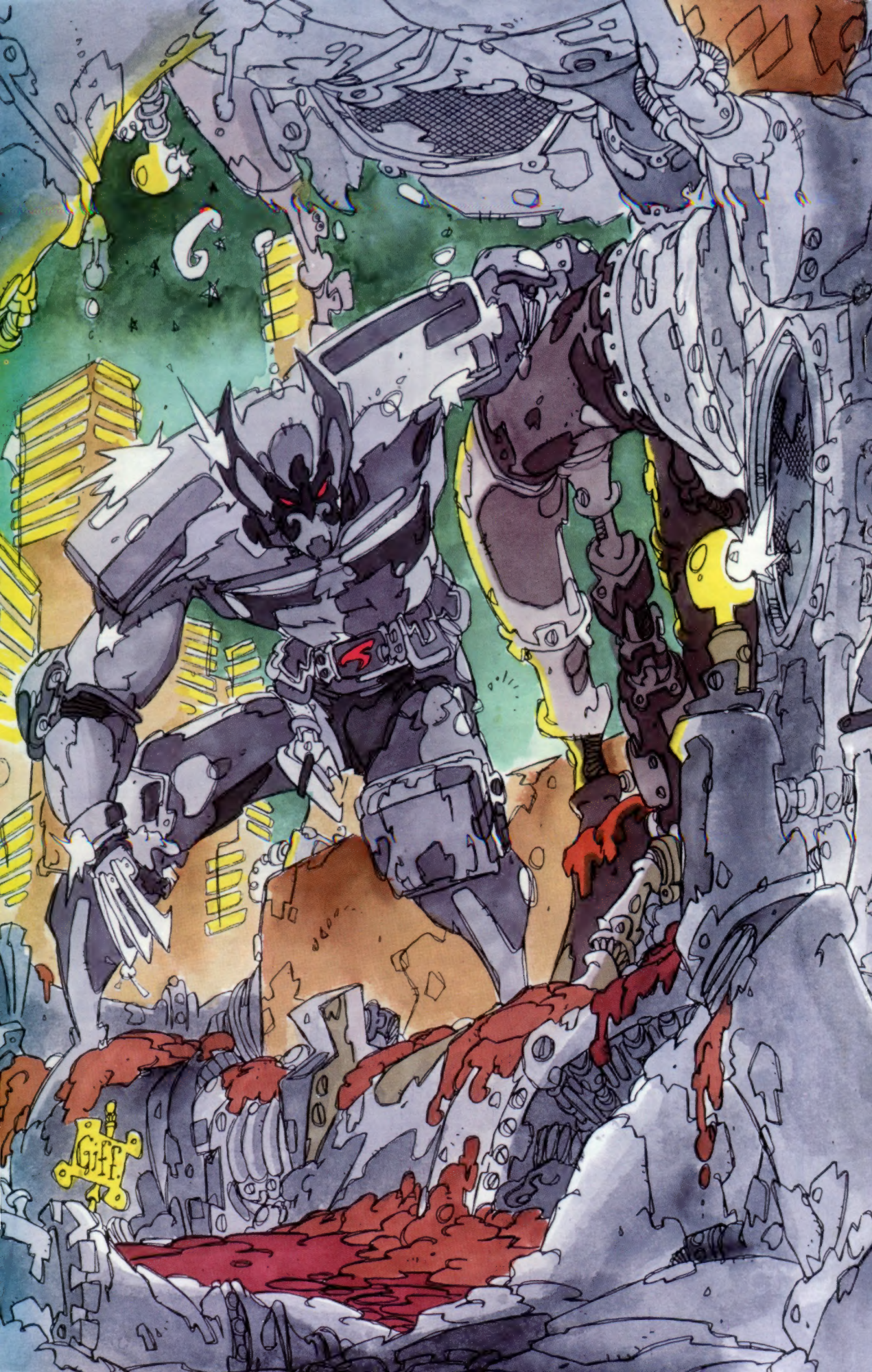
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